

DAILY EXPRESS ②

Picture: SAM PEARCE

Squatters get right to live in £9m mansion

By Jo Willey

SQUATTERS who took over a £9million empty house have been given permission to stay - by the owner.

Instead of trying to evict the 14 illegal occupants a housing association has come to an agreement with them.

Circle 33 Housing Association bought the rundown five-storey property in Hampstead, north-west London, for £8,770,000 in July last year.

It is negotiating to develop the semi-detached building with the local authority, Camden Council.

The squatters can stay until the development starts.

But they must keep the property, which boasts a sweeping gravel drive, huge garden and is in the heart of a celebrity-packed neighbourhood, in good condition, carry out repairs and provide security. They will also have to behave to "an acceptable standard".

The Victorian mansion, divided into 13 flats, was empty for years until the squatters - some from Germany, France, Australia and America - moved in two months ago.

A spokesman for Circle 33 said: "The group approached our organisation requesting they be allowed to remain and, after full consultation with the

immediate neighbours we employed solicitors to prepare a licence to occupy, which has been signed with the squatters.

"Following the consultation, the neighbours have said that they are satisfied with the action we are taking. While this

group have been in occupation, there has been no feedback from neighbours to suggest any anti-social behaviour whatsoever."

The association can ask the squatters to leave with 28 days' notice. Neighbour Ruth



STAYING POWER: The imposing home taken over by squatters with, left, one of the bedrooms

Steadman said: "They are not noisy."
"They are not disruptive. We would rather have them next door than have people having raves all night."

Squatter Jack Harrison, 35, told the Daily Express they were a group of "working individuals, artists, musicians, families, community and environmental activists and students". Some have been squatting together for 14 years.

A 1994 report from the Empty Homes Agency said that there were 868,000 empty buildings in Britain, a number which is likely to have increased dramatically since then.

